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ABSTRACT

Sir Sandford Fleming College in Ontario, Canada is in the process of transforming itself from a teaching-based college to a student-centered organization. Faculty-led teams are a critical element in this transformation. With active support from its faculty union, Fleming has reduced its administrative ranks by one-third and created a host of teams led by faculty members. In this conference presentation, Fleming staff review the following topics: (1) the background and context that led to the redesign of the college in 1995; (2) the principles behind the model supported by both management and the faculty; (3) the importance of teams and consensual decision-making in a learning-centered college; (4) a case study of the experience of one academic center from the viewpoint of its leader (also a faculty union executive member); (5) support staff roles; and (6) accountability measures such as key performance indicators and 360-degree performance evaluation. (AS)

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SIR SANDFORD FLEMING COLLEGE

Peterborough, Ontario Canada

"Let the Deed Show"

FACULTY-LED TEAMS:

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

A presentation to the
League for Innovation
in the Community College
1998 Conference

Dallas, Texas

by

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Faculty-Led Teams: Key Success Factors

Abstract

Can a college replace deans/chairs with faculty-led teams and still function effectively? With active support from its faculty union Sir Sandford Fleming College in Ontario, Canada, has reduced its administrative ranks by one-third and created a host of academic teams led by faculty members.

Fleming College is in the process of transforming itself from an institutionally-/teaching-centred college into a learning organization committed to student success. The college believes it needs to model a learning-centred approach in its organizational structure and values if students are to experience the same. Faculty-led teams are a critical element in this transformation.

In this conference presentation, Fleming staff review:

- **the background and context that led to the redesign of the college in 1995**
- **the principles behind this model supported by both management and the faculty union**
- **the importance of teams and consensual decision-making in a learning-centred college**
- **a case study of the experience of one academic centre from the viewpoint of its leader (also a faculty union executive member)**
- **examples of the roles played by support staff**
- **accountability measures such as key performance indicators and 360° performance evaluation**

Background

Presenter: Terry Dance-Bennink, Vice-President Academic

Can a college replace deans/chairs with faculty-led teams and still function effectively?
With active support from its faculty union, Sir Sandford Fleming College in Ontario, Canada has reduced its administrative ranks by one-third and created academic teams led by faculty members.

Why did we opt for such a radical move? A 20% reduction in both federal and provincial funding in the fall of 1995 was certainly an impetus. Fleming College, however, has had a history of collegial relations between "management" and "staff". This is a critical factor underlying the success, to date, of our organizational re-design.

Faced with bad financial news in 1995, Fleming created an Organizational Design Team with internal and external stakeholders to re-design the organization from top to bottom. The goal was to accommodate an overall 20% reduction in funding over a two year period while preserving the best of Fleming's programs, services, staff, and facilities. At that time, Fleming had 5500 FTEs, 540 F/T staff and a $55 million budget.

Such a climate might well have led to hostile labour relations and a spirit of retrenchment and fear. Instead, the college chose to turn adversity into an opportunity. Fleming continues to believe that nothing short of a radical transformation in its academic philosophy, delivery mechanisms, and structure is required.

The College is in the process of transforming itself from a predominantly teaching and institutionally-centred organization into a learning-centred college focussed on student success.

We have embraced many of the principles outlined by Dr. Terry O'Banion, President of the League for Innovation in the Community College.

Characteristics of a Learning-Centred College

- **programs and services create substantive change in individual learners**
- **learners are engaged as full partners in the learning process, assuming primary responsibility for their own choices**
- **there are as many options for learning as possible**
- **learners are assisted in forming and participating in collaborative learning activities**
- **the role of learning facilitator is defined by the needs of the learners**
- **all college employees identify with their role in supporting learning**
- **success is measured by documented, improved, and expanded learning for learners**

We also believe that to implement these characteristics of a learning-centred college, the college itself needs to become a learning organization and model the above principles in how it organizes academic work, handles interpersonal relationships, and makes decisions.

How can learners experience collaborative learning activities if college faculty and staff are treated in an authoritarian, top-down manner? How can we expect our learners to become good team-players if we ourselves lack those skills? We have to practice what we preach. A learning-centred college and a learning organization are integrally linked.

Fleming Redesigns Itself

In the fall of 1995, the College's Organizational Design Team recommended a reduction of administrative ranks in order to preserve front-line services and academic programs whenever possible.

Deans and Chairs were replaced by Academic Team Leaders drawn primarily from faculty ranks and selected freely by faculty members, with agreement from the faculty bargaining unit. A comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding was developed with the faculty union, and both management and the union agree that, to date, the new model is working extremely well.

The MOU outlines several key assumptions about the way in which the college must "do business" in the future. These include:

- **cross-functional and interdisciplinary collaboration will be critical to ensure relevant learning opportunities and services**
- **decision-making must be devolved closer to the learner, through empowered staff and teams, in order to ensure flexibility, responsiveness and results for our learners**
- **interdisciplinary options for students will be required to provide a competitive edge**
- **effective teams and leaders in the new structure must foster shared responsibility and accountability for results among peers and colleagues**
- **continuous learning and improvement are essential to success and can be fostered through dialogue within and between teams and functions.**

The College established six centres of specialization at that time in such areas as natural resources, community development and health, law and justice, management and business studies, interdisciplinary studies, and applied computing and information technology.

Academic Team Leaders (ATLs) were chosen by the faculty in 5 of the 6 centres. The team leaders, together with their team members, are fully responsible for the daily operation of each centre including such responsibilities as:

- **staff recruitment and hiring**
- **formative evaluation of faculty**
- **professional development of team members**
- **budget development and monitoring**
- **Program development, modification, and suspension**
- **evaluation of team performance and leadership**
- **marketing and promotion of the centre's programs**

The team leaders serve a three year term with the option for renewal of a second term if the team so decides. Each leader is expected to spend a minimum of 10% of his/her time in direct student involvement (teaching, advising, etc.), and receives extra compensation for assuming this leadership role.

The academic team leaders report directly to the Vice-President Academic. The VPA is involved in performance issues that entail summative evaluation only. At this time, there are no outstanding faculty grievances, and the Union/College Committee meets regularly to resolve any potential disputes. (Fleming's faculty was one of only two college bargaining units in the province of Ontario to vote against a strike mandate last May).

The college-wide Academic Leaders Team is made up of the ATLs, as well as the VPA, the Learning Resource Centres Director, Training & Development Services Director, the Academic Planning & Development Manager, two operational managers who assist the academic team leaders with their daily operations, and two campus operations leaders. The Academic Leaders Team (ALT) sets major academic policies, allocates academic resources, and is responsible for all aspects of academic delivery.

Teams and Consensual Decision-Making

The new structure depends totally on commitment to a team-based organization. Nine characteristics of high-performing teams have been identified and learning outcomes specified with recommended staff development activities. A large number of cross-functional, matrix teams have also been established (marketing, course-registration, campus operations groups, etc.)

Each team has set its norms and decision-making principles. The teams vary, in part, based on the nature of the various disciplines and personalities involved. Consensus, however, is the predominant decision-making mode. Consensus is defined as the ability to "live with a decision".

A full-time Facilitator of Organizational Transformation has special responsibility to assist the organization in its transformation into a genuine learning organization. He is frequently called upon to facilitate team development and help resolve interpersonal/inter-team/conflicts.

With decisions now made closer to the front-line, former boundaries between "administrators" and "staff" have been blurred.

This emphasis on teams is having a noticeable effect on curriculum. The Applied Computing & Information Technology Centre, for example, is in the process of introducing an entirely project based sixth semester for all of its third year students. No formal courses will be offered and faculty "services" will be negotiated for as required by the students, with a focus on interdisciplinary collaboration and applied research.

The concept of a self-directed "learning commons" is migrating beyond Fleming's formal Learning Resource Centres. (The main campus has a very popular open area within its LRC with 250+ networked Pentiums for self-directed and team-based student learning). An engineering commons, a health sciences commons, and a natural resources commons are in development in an effort to model collaborative learning principles, and less time-bound modes of learning.

Fleming continues to operate with a balanced budget, and a favourable year-end variance despite its financial challenges, which instills confidence in staff and Board members alike in the capacity of the organization to operate in an efficient yet supportive manner.

A Case Study of One Academic Centre

Presenter: Kate Kincaid, R.N., M.Ed., OPSEU Loc. 352 Executive and Academic Team Leader

Background

In the spring of 1996, the now defunct School of Applied Arts and Health met to design the profile of the Leader for the new Centre of Community Development & Health (CD&H). Team members identified the knowledge, skills and abilities the leader would need in order to take a group of faculty in twelve diverse programs into a new academic leadership model. It was very interesting as a faculty member to participate in this process of describing a job I wished to apply for.

I competed successfully for the job and was hired by my team for a three year contract as its Academic Team Leader. The new Centre was faced with operationalizing the nine characteristics of effective teams.

Nine Characteristics of Effective Teams

- **shared mandate/vision**
- **team goals**
- **appropriate structure**
- **team norms**
- **decision-making process**
- **member role-clarification**
- **conflict resolution strategies**
- **performance management process**
- **professional development plan**

Establishing a culture that would welcome and develop new strategies for working together was the first challenge. Our first Centre meeting had an Alice in Wonderland theme. Through the looking glass and down the rabbit hole to "who knows where" took on a very real meaning. Our meeting room was packed with a central table full of various sized and coloured tea pots. I was hosting the mad hatter's tea party, and every team member had the opportunity to state his/her aspirations for the new team.

The vision we embraced is **CD&H is a Centre of Excellence through its students, partners, curriculum, and team members. We have boundless capacity to develop rich and healthy relationships within our community.**

Our early team goals were not prioritized. We knew we wanted to not just survive but to grow in a team-based environment with a quality to our work that we could be proud of. Our team goals included:

- communicate: widely, deeply, and appropriately
- develop trust and mutual respect for one another
- empower each other
- play, risk-take, and grow in a supportive environment
- commit to the team and its mandate
- promote diversity (the professional backgrounds of our team members provide an interesting and at times humorous opportunity for cross affiliations: nurses, massage therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, counsellors, curators, conservationists, native elders, early childhood educators, recreation leaders, educational assistants!)
- develop sensitive conflict resolution skills
- balance personal/professional/team needs
- advocate for students' learning needs
- recognize and take pride in team accomplishments
- recognize and value individuals' community work (All our faculty volunteer in their communities. Our students do field placement in 529 agencies and over the course of one year have provided 19,510 hours of service to these groups.)

The biggest challenge we have faced is finding the time necessary to build consensus and work as a team.

In order to support the work of the Centre we then redesigned our infrastructure.

School of Applied Arts and Health 1996	Centre for Community Development & Health 1997

Program Structure

10 individual programs	4 clusters (incorporating 12 programs) • Health • Education • Counselling • Arts & Heritage

Staffing Mix

1	Dean	1	Academic Team Leader
1	Administrative Assistant	1	Support Staff
2	P-T Studies Staff	.2	Operations Manager
3	Support Staff	19.5	Co-ordinators (including 5 function Co-ordinators)
3	D.A.'s		• Educational Technologist
11	Coordinators		• Marketing
			• Training & Development Services Liaison
			• Professional Development
			• Community Development

Program clusters were developed to provide faculty and Program support, identify and share resources, enhance curriculum development, ensure communication, and develop leadership skills.

The coordinator role in the Centre is a critical role for faculty and student success. It involves such duties as:

- Program leadership/advocatacy
- curriculum design and development
- networking with community and industry
- recruitment and marketing
- assistance with operational issues
- participation in Program, Coordinator, and Centre meetings

Faculty members are also expected to help carry out some of these responsibilities. Faculty have been empowered to make their own decisions. It was a scary transition. We felt secure in the old system where administrative decision-making was more "pronounced". Security now had to come from shared decision-making and trust. Another critical role for faculty is peer formative performance management. We engage in a process of teacher and course evaluation, peer

feedback and review, and design of professional development plans on an annual basis.

In the early months of the Centre's formation in 1996, we developed norms - way too many norms! But, we couldn't seem to cut them down any further. Our norms included:

- respect each other and our uniqueness
- discuss issues not individuals
- no personal attacks
- inclusion vs. exclusion
- listen to each other
- affirmation - in small as well as big ways
- value expertise
- individual commitment and accountability to team tasks
- team accountability to individuals
- risk taking and creativity

The team revisited its norms one year later and nothing was changed.

Through Centre, Coordinator, and Program meetings, we experimented with consensual decision making. The guidelines we developed were:

- include those most affected by a decision in the process
- consider the impact of a decision
- screen agenda items
- communicate broadly
- use the electronic listserve for all minutes and notes
- ensure access to discussion and process
- silence is consent (verify/encourage inclusion)
- clarify timelines connected to decisions
- secure support for the team from other Centers/Service areas, students, advisory committees, focus groups

Absolute buy-in rather than a vague consensus is a more solid foundation for making change in an academic environment. As a group, we used professional development opportunities at least once a semester to develop new directions, new commitments, and new ways of accomplishing our mandate. My background in nursing administration and as a former department administrator at the college forced me to look for a balance in my leadership role to ensure I did not make unilateral decisions on behalf of the team.

Our conflict resolution strategies have matured over time. We have tried on all leading theorists and have invented a few of our own! Our ability to confront and deal with issues has evolved from a very consultative problem-solving style to a self-managing one. If confrontation is a healthy and necessary part of team building, why do we avoid it as much as we do? Our students play an active role as well in helping the Centre resolve issues. Academic Regulations and the

Students Rights and Responsibilities documents encourage learners to deal with their problems in a professional and proactive way. As an Academic Team Leader, I work hard to resolve issues with the individuals most directly involved. In a structure with very little middle management, it is important for the Centre to be able to resolve conflicts.

Support Staff Roles

Presenter: Tracy Groombridge, Assistant to the Vice-President Academic, Secretary to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee (Board of Governors), and Support Staff member

With the re-design to a learning-centred College, Support Staff have been encouraged to be equal members of cross-disciplinary teams (i.e. teams consisting of Administration, Team Leaders, Faculty, and Support Staff). As a Support Staff member, my main role at college wide meetings is to take minutes. However, I am viewed as a full partner and made to feel very welcome and encouraged to participate in discussions. Decision-making is by consensus and if there is something that a Support Staff member cannot "live with", his/her opinion can sway a decision just as much as the opinion of Administration or Faculty.

Support Staff are also very much engaged in the learning process itself. In August of 1996, Dr. Terry O'Banion identified 6 key characteristics of a learning-centred college. By June of 1997, Dr. O'Banion had added one more characteristic which reads "all college employees identify with their role in supporting learning". At Sir Sandford Fleming College, Support Staff are very much "supporters" of learning. Two examples of this are: each year Fleming seeks new Student Advisors from all sectors (Administration, Faculty, and Support Staff). Advisors assist students in: defining and/or redefining their educational goals and objectives; understanding choices that are available; selecting courses for study and developing their timetables; understanding and meeting institutional requirements; and using institutional policies, procedures, resources and programs appropriately. As student advisors, Support Staff take a great deal of pride in the fact that they function as a life-line to the students.

Secondly, two Support Staff members organize and oversee Fleming's 250 seat networked Learning Commons. These two individuals are the anchor behind the success of our self-directed Learning Commons. These two examples reflect the ongoing role of Support Staff in the direct delivery of learning opportunities at Fleming. There are many more examples.

How Do We Know The Model Is Working?

Fleming has embraced faculty-led teams not simply to be an enlightened and progressive employer, but first and foremost because we believe a team-based organization fosters student success.

Key Performance Indicators

We emphasize and practice collegiality, but accountability to our students, employers, and funders is just as important. Every staff member is aware of this. (Our provincial government is about to introduce performance-based funding). The college spent almost two years debating a set of comprehensive key performance indicators which were adopted in 1996 and have since been revised.

The college's mission provides the overall context. The indicators are then related to the college's six goals, with concrete and measurable benchmarks established for both academic programs and service departments. Data has been gathered on academic programs for the past 3-4 years.

The annual, academic year-end report for 1997-98 reviews the outcomes to date. The report documents a 92% graduate satisfaction rate with the quality of education at Fleming, and an 83% job placement rate, among other indicators. Enrolment increased by 5% in 1996 and 2% in 1998.

In addition, every post-secondary Program has been evaluated against the indicators and a chart has been circulated throughout the college showing the results. Each centre of specialization has assessed its overall results and identified corrective measures in its annual strategic plan.

The college acknowledges that a further challenge is to assess whether student learning has in fact occurred - the ultimate measure of student success. The above indicators focus only on end results. Each Program needs to establish or confirm its learning outcomes and determine, over time, whether those outcomes have been achieved.

360 Degree Performance Evaluation

Another critical ingredient in Fleming's accountability processes is 360 degree performance evaluation. How do we know whether the new organizational model and principles are working? Faculty and staff are not shy with their feedback! All administrators and faculty leaders are evaluated by their supervisors, selected peers, and working team members on an annual basis. A self-assessment is also completed.

Faculty are evaluated by students twice a year, and a peer and self-assessment mechanism has just recently been introduced.

More than 90% of staff evaluated their leaders as good to excellent last year, and an equally high percentage of students rated faculty likewise.

This commitment to 360 degree evaluation is designed to complement the review of programs and services, by adding a deeper, more personal dimension. The quality of academic programming is dependent on each staff member's commitment to "personal mastery" and ongoing professional development. Feedback from a variety of customers and stakeholders is invaluable.

Conclusion

Presenter: Kate Kincaid

Voltaire once said: *"No problem can withstand the combined thoughts of the people."* This quote resonated with me two years ago. I now believe it.

The key success factors for our teams have been, and will continue to be:

- commitment - to making it work
- shared learning - growing together
- accountability - personally and as a group
- communication - in every way, shape and form
- consultation - engaging people in the process
- consensus - genuine buy-in is best
- time - the foundation for all of the above

In the twelve years that I have worked at Sir Sandford Fleming College, I believe morale is at its best today. We are busy.... engaged.... and creative! Our learners can only benefit.

·LET·THE·DEED·SHAW·